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Committee on Relations with the Host Country

Letter dated 17 October 2006 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Committee

In your capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, I have the honour to request that you circulate as a document of the Committee the attached note from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations (see annex).

(*Signed*) Alejandro D. **Wolff**

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Annex to the letter dated 17 October 2006 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Committee

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations and refers to the latter's diplomatic note No. 1361 of 26 September 2006, containing a formal protest relating to the treatment received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela, Mr. Nicolás Maduro Moros, at Kennedy Airport on 23 September 2006. The United States Mission also refers to the diplomatic note sent to the United States Embassy in Caracas by the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry that appears in the annex to the letter dated 28 September 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, which was circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 148 (A/61/474).

The Permanent Mission's note of 26 September alleges that verbal mistreatment and forced physical detention of the Foreign Minister by United States authorities violated the principles and norms enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, the United Nations Headquarters Agreement and other international instruments. Because the Foreign Minister purchased three one-way plane tickets for cash at the airport shortly before his flight, he and his family were asked to undergo the same type of additional security screening required of other travellers purchasing tickets at the last minute for cash. Airport records and witnesses at the scene provide absolutely no evidence of verbal mistreatment whatsoever, and the Minister was not detained. He refused to undergo the inspection asked of him; 27 minutes after he entered the inspection area, an American Airlines manager decided that the airline would allow the Minister and his family to board the aircraft without the second inspection.

The United States Mission wishes to emphasize that nothing in any of the agreements, conventions or instruments cited in the note from the Permanent Mission of Venezuela exempts foreign ministers, diplomatic envoys or any travellers from security screening at airports in the United States. Such screening is vital to ensure the safety of the flying public, including cabinet ministers and other high-level officials of any government.

Both the note from the Permanent Mission and the note addressed to the United States Embassy in Caracas call on the host country to take appropriate measures to prevent similar situations in the future. As the Permanent Mission is aware, the host country announced the Airport Escorts Courtesies Program in February 2004. Pursuant to this program, permanent missions to the United Nations may request the assistance of a State Department representative who will escort cabinet-level visitors, their spouses and their children under 12 years of age around security screening checkpoints when departing from United States airports. It is regrettable that the Permanent Mission of Venezuela did not request an escort for Foreign Minister Maduro Moros on 23 September. Had it done so, the Foreign Minister would not have experienced any delay whatsoever. The United States Mission is pleased to note that when Foreign Minister Maduro Moros returned to New York several days later, the Permanent Mission did request a security detail for him and accordingly one was provided. The Minister had no problems on arrival or departure.